

20 Questions for Ambassador Yovanovitch

1) President Obama's broken Armenian Genocide pledge

President Obama promised – clearly and repeatedly – to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

As early as January of 2008 and as late as four days before his election, he stressed his “firmly held conviction that the Armenian Genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence. The facts are undeniable.”

And yet, as has been widely reported, he broke his pledge after taking office.

Can you point to a single advantage to America's moral standing or geopolitical interests that has resulted from the President's decision not to recognize the Armenian Genocide?

2) Differences between Bush and Obama on Armenian Genocide policy?

President Obama, as a candidate, criticized President Bush's refusal to recognize the Armenian Genocide as “inexcusable.”

Can you cite any differences between the Bush and Obama administrations on the Armenian Genocide?

3) Differences between U.S. and Turkish government policies on the Armenian Genocide

How does the Administration's policy on the Armenian Genocide differ from the Turkish government's policy?

4) Armenian Genocide Resolution

As a candidate, President Obama said he strongly supported the Armenian Genocide Resolution.

What is the State Department's position on the adoption of this human rights legislation?

5) Historical Commission

State Department officials have pressed Armenia, both publicly and privately, to accept Turkey's proposal to establish a historical commission to look into whether the Armenian Genocide constitutes a true case of genocide.

The commission clearly represents a genocide denial tactic that is meant to cast doubt on what is thoroughly documented and settled history. It has been sharply criticized as a cynical ploy by the International Association of Genocide Scholars and many others.

Have you ever urged, suggested, or in any other manner encouraged Armenia to accept an Armenia-Turkey historical commission?

What is your view on those who, despite the overwhelming evidence of this crime, continue to argue that a historical commission should be established to determine if the Holocaust took place?

6) U.S. diplomats and freedom of expression

Ambassador John Evans was fired as Ambassador to Armenia for speaking truthfully about the Armenian Genocide.

In Ambassador Evans' defense, Senator Obama, wrote in a July 28, 2006 letter to then Secretary of State Rice that, "when State Department instructions are such that an Ambassador must engage in strained reasoning - or even outright falsehood - that defies a common sense interpretation of events in order to follow orders, then it is time to revisit the State Department's policy guidance on that issue."

He also stressed that that, "An official policy that calls on diplomats to distort the historical facts is an untenable policy."

Have you ever received any instructions – directly or indirectly – from the U.S. government regarding how you should express yourself on the subject of the Armenian Genocide?

If yes, what exactly were those instructions, how were they transmitted, and who communicated them to you?

If no, what prevents you from speaking openly and honestly right now in recognition of the Armenian Genocide?

7) Turkish recognition

If the Republic of Turkey recognized the Armenian Genocide, would the United States then also do the same?

8) Senate confirmation process

During your confirmation process before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Obama asked you what steps the State Department was taking to encourage greater study and recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Turkey.

Could you now, with the benefit of your recent experience serving in Armenia, expand on your response and update us on the efforts that you and your State Department colleagues are undertaking to encourage Turkey to recognize the Armenian Genocide?

9) The Armenia-Turkey “roadmap”

The State Department has welcomed the recently announced Armenia-Turkey “roadmap” and called on both countries to normalize ties “without preconditions and within a reasonable timeframe.”

-- Armenia has never had preconditions, but Turkey has restated its precondition that Azerbaijan first approve any normalization of Armenia-Turkey ties.

-- Armenia wants to move quickly, but Turkey has stalled the process to leverage the appearance of “dialogue” and block progress toward universal Armenian Genocide recognition.

How has the State Department expressed its dissatisfaction with Turkey’s preconditions and delays?

What exactly does the State Department mean when it says “within a reasonable time frame?” What are the benchmarks and when is the deadline?

10) Foreign assistance to Armenia

The Administration proposed a 38% cut in economic aid to Armenia, which is, as you know, facing dual Turkey-Azerbaijan blockades and an ongoing economic crisis. This was the sharpest proposed cut to any of the countries of Europe and Eurasia.

How do you reconcile this proposed reduction with the President’s pledge to “maintain” aid and “foster Armenia’s growth and development,” particularly within the context of increases in both overall foreign aid spending and larger allocations to nearly all of the other recipient countries of the region?

11) Foreign aid double standards

The Administration has responded to problems in Armenia with sharp and sustained public criticism, a 38% reduction in economic aid, and a nearly \$80 million cut in Millennium Challenge funding.

At the same time, the Administration has sought increases in aid to Georgia and Azerbaijan, both of which have serious democracy, corruption, and governance problems. Georgia is violently cracking down on its opposition and Azerbaijan has become a one-family monarchy, yet neither has been subject to the levels of U.S. criticism that Armenia faces.

How do you account for this double standard?

12) Military aid parity

The President has proposed breaking the longstanding parity in military aid to Armenia and Azerbaijan, a move that, particularly in light of Azerbaijan's threats of war, will upset the military balance in a highly volatile region.

Why would the Administration propose breaking a crucial agreement that has proven so effective at keeping the peace and strengthening America's standing as an honest broker in the peace talks.

Can you, upon your return to Yerevan, provide Armenian American community leadership groups with a report on the information and processes the State Department used to ensure that its military aid request was calibrated to ensure military balance between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

13) Russia-Georgia war

Armenia suffered hundreds of millions of dollars of economic damage during the Russia-Georgia war, even as it provided extensive support and aid to U.S. diplomats and other fleeing fighting in the region.

Why has the Administration, which has provided upwards of a billion dollars in post-war aid to Georgia, not offered any assistance at all to help Armenia recover from the damage it endured during this conflict?

14) Nagorno Karabagh

President Obama pledged, during his presidential campaign, that his Administration would work for "a lasting and durable settlement of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict that is agreeable to all parties, and based upon America's founding commitment to the principles of democracy and self determination."

Despite this, State Department officials consistently cites territorial integrity as the primary principle in the settlement process.

Do you view territorial integrity as having any more importance to a Nagorno Karabagh settlement than the principles of democracy and self-determination cited by the President?

15) Restrictions on U.S.-Nagorno Karabagh contacts/communications.

Azerbaijan has long opposed any official contacts between the U.S. and Nagorno Karabagh, with the single exception of the State Department's OSCE negotiator.

What is the reasoning – from the U.S. perspective – behind the restrictions that prevent the free flow of information, visitors, exchanges, communications and other interactions intended to contribute to greater mutual understanding between the U.S. and Nagorno Karabagh?

16) Development programs in Nagorno Karabagh

Azerbaijan has long opposed any direct U.S. aid to Nagorno Karabagh, particularly development assistance.

What is the reasoning – from the U.S. perspective – behind the restriction on development aid to help build roads, bridges, and hospitals in Nagorno Karabagh?

17) U.S.-Armenia economic relations

Has the Administration taken any meaningful steps to negotiate agreements that would broaden U.S.-Armenia economic and commercial ties, such as a Double Tax Treaty, a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, or a Free Trade Agreement?

18) Javakhk

Why has the Administration been silent on the unfair arrests and intimidation of Armenian community in Javakhk?

What has the Administration done to support economic development in the Javakhk region of Georgia?

19) U.S. standing as a leader in opposing genocide

Should the U.S. stand against genocide represent a moral imperative, or should our position on the condemnation, prevention, and commemoration of genocide be a political issue subject to the influence of other countries?

Do you think that the credibility of the United States is harmed when we fail to recognize the truth?

20) The State Department's credibility

As students of history, Armenian Americans are painfully aware of the State Department's long and unfortunate history of fighting recognition of the Armenian Genocide, opposing freedom for Nagorno Karabagh, unfairly pressuring Armenia, and generally advancing U.S.-Turkey relations and Caspian energy interests at the expense of Armenia.

Can you speak, as a general matter, to how you think the State Department can earn the trust of the Armenian American community?